

Asset #18: Young people spend three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations.

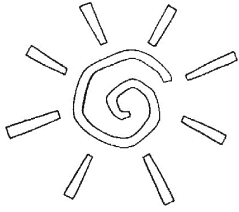
THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH PROGRAMS

Youth programs—which include sports, scouting, recreation, camps, after-school programs, and religious programs—can provide fulfilling experiences that help young people develop new skills and master challenges. They also provide a safe place for youth outside of school where they can be in contact with caring non-parent adults. Research shows that the developmental asset of participation in youth programs results in increased self-esteem; better development of life skills, leadership skills, and public speaking abilities; fewer psychosocial problems such as loneliness, shyness, and hopelessness; decreased risk behaviors; and more thriving indicators.

The following discussion topics, adapted from the book *What Teens Need to Succeed**, can help young people of all ages recognize the value of youth programs, and better understand the benefits of the programs in which they participate:

- Overall, are you **happy** with how many different things you do with your time?
- Are your activities stimulating and **challenging**?
- Do these **activities** bring out your best?
- Are you making **friends** with caring, responsible adults in your activities?
- Are you learning new **skills and talents**, and acquiring new knowledge?

If the young person can't answer "yes" to most of these questions, then it may be time to discuss the program's activities with the adults in charge or to help the youth find new, meaningful activities that better meet his or her interests.



ACTIVITIES

FOR FAMILIES

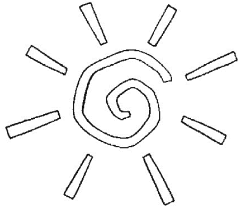
- Make sure that your children are participating in positive, asset-building youth programs that they enjoy. If they're not, help them find new programs that meet their interests. Help them understand that they might not fully enjoy or benefit from the program immediately, and encourage them to make a time commitment of a certain number of weeks or months to give the program an adequate chance.
- When your younger children join a new program, help them with introductions to their peers. They'll feel more comfortable and confident when they know the other participants.
- At mealtime, ask your children specific questions about the activities, leaders, and other participants in their youth programs. It's a good way to spark conversation and to make sure that their programs are meeting their needs and interests.
- While participating in sports can be positive for young people, the intense competition that can occur in sports programs typically is not. Make sure that coaches balance the competitive aspect of sports with the development of positive skills like leadership, teamwork, and good sportsmanship.
- Role-model positive behavior when attending sporting events. Good sportsmanship in the bleachers helps youth practice managing their own responses to challenges and successes.

FOR ALL ADULTS

- Youth programs can provide excellent volunteer opportunities! If you have a skill or talent to share, offering it in a youth program is a great way to make a difference.
- Looking for ongoing or one-time youth volunteers? Check with the leaders of youth programs near you. Your needs might dovetail with one of their service or skills development projects, making it possible for youth to serve as resources and gain valuable experience.

AT SCHOOL OR IN YOUTH PROGRAMS

- Youth program staff has exceptional opportunities to serve as asset builders for the youth they serve, acting as role models, mentors, and caring, non-family adults. Make sure that all program staff has been trained in the developmental assets framework, with additional guidance to identify and take advantage of asset building opportunities that arise.



- Regularly review activity plans with an eye toward providing opportunities for youth members to help decide and plan activities, and finding ways to incorporate service opportunities into the program's primary mission. Intentionally make it a top priority for program staff to be a positive influence on the youth in your program.

**This article was provided courtesy of Project Cornerstone.
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